MONITORING OF AN EMERGENCY INTERVENTION TEAM

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"Failure is an event, never a person" (William D. Brown)

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever" ("Mahatma" Gandhi)

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2. INTRODUCTION

The results and the potential for development of an organization can be measured not only by financial indicators but also by the physical health and psychological balance of its collaborators based on making sense of the work purpose, on competence, and on motivation to achieve. An organization's, Human Resources Department therefore has to insure the maximum operational capacity of its employees (by targeting the individual's rational, emotional and social capacities), establish a climate of honesty and respect at all levels of the organization in order to promote the functionality of the organization and to reduce important costs due to demotivation, absenteeism, unscheduled leave, poor decisions or even sabotage [6].

This study evaluates an emergency intervention team acting in the field of civil society. The team's mandate is to respond to emergency threats, requiring investigation, characterization and assessment of the danger in order to contain human suffering and to minimize the impact on the economy. This is achieved through a network which goal is to turn knowledge gained into effective interventions in time to protect communities.

When an emergency arises the team ensures the operational readiness by identifying members of the emergency intervention network. Given that no single institution may have all needed capacities in a given situation, the network acts as a technical partner to provide rapid, multi-disciplinary, and technical support for an emergency response. The team also acts as a steering committee and provides operational support for specific assessments.

Today communities expect faster responses, more systematic interventions and better defined contributions to sustain control measures. Partners expect an operational platform delivering a rapid and adequate response. Ensuring that the communities can share information rapidly, mobilize resources and implement effective control measures in the face of a major emergency has been and remains a major challenge. The team has met these needs by facilitating immediate access to expertise as well as utilizing and focusing that knowledge from all appropriate sources, to support communities facing threats. These activities, conducted in an emergency situation and linked to high responsibilities, demand a substantial effort of all team members.

The objective of this study is to assess the organizational environment and to examine the individual personal psychological state of the staff, understanding that this is of crucial importance to ensure the operational capacity over time. Thus, this study aims to provide basic principles of guidance to improve the working conditions for team members in relation to the organizational environment and to its intervention mandate. The problems studied are of crucial importance for the long-term effectiveness and the sustainability, and possibly even the survival of the team.

3. GOALS OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study was to identify threats to the physical and psychological balance of professional staff members and its causes. Based on the observation that the team members are working under stressful conditions, the need was felt to be proactive in the prevention of staff members' physical, cognitive and psychological exhaustion ("burn-out"). The documentation of team members' assessment of their working environment was felt to be an essential part of the strategy to be able to address adequately the concerns occasionally expressed verbally. For this, general questions about the Agency as a whole, specific problems related to human resources management, issues related to the services provided by the Human Resources Services, and the personal evaluation of the interviewee's own situation were assessed.

The director of the Department and the coordinator of the central Human Resources Services were informed about the study and gave his/her approval. The investigator was part of the team himself.

4. METHODOLOGY

The approach chosen for the evaluation was based on interviews with individual staff members by the investigator, based on a pre-established interview schedule (Annex 1). This qualitative approach was felt to be appropriate for the analysis of the team because no evaluation of this kind had ever been conducted since the creation of the Team. It is noted that the activities performed by the Team under its mandate are significantly different from most activities performed by other teams in the Agency.

4.1 INTERVIEWS

Eleven (31%) individual interviews (duration approximately 30 minutes) were conducted by the investigator among the 35 professional team members. The interviews were conducted so as to include a representative sample of the professionals working in the three groups: 5 out of 14 (36%) members of the risk assessment group, 3 out of 10 (33%) members of the technical group, the investigator being part of this group, and 3 out of 4 (75%) members of the intervention group. All three chiefs of the groups were included. The interviews were also balanced according to the number of professionals working as field operation specialists, backup and logisticians. The gender balance was affected by the absence of many professional female team members due to duty travels: 27% (3/11) of the interviewees were of female gender, compared to 40% (14/35) of the Teams' professionals being female at the time of the study (female/total: risk assessment group: 1/14 = 7%, technical group: 1/3 = 33%, emergency intervention group: 1/3 = 33%). All professionals interviewed had a sufficiently long experience of work to be able to assess their working environment.

The interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. To guarantee this, the answers were pooled in the results section. The interview schedules remain the property of the investigator and have not been shared with anyone else.

The period during which the interviews took place was from April to June 2005. Interviews were conducted at the work place.

4.2 LIMITATIONS

Several remarks concerning our methodological approach have to be made:

- This work was not aimed to test any hypothesis, but was aimed to describe an existing situation. Therefore questions were raised with as little "a priori" assumptions as possible;
- Based upon the limited number of interviews and the context in which the team operates, a strictly qualitative approach was chosen, and therefore no statistical analysis was performed;
- The responses collected represent the subjective assessments of the interviewees. Therefore, contradictory evaluations may be present due to different individual perceptions;
- The interview schedule format using open ended questions favors in general the expression of negative opinions at the cost of positive ones;
- The results are reported in the order of the questions posed to the interviewee - no ranking was applied;
- The reported results represent the transcript of the opinions of the interviewees, without any evaluation, modification or addition by the investigator.

4.3 STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule (Annex 1) was structured according to 5 different areas of potential importance:

- General questions about the Agency as a whole (5 questions);
- Specific problems related to human resources management within the team (10 questions);
- Issues related to the services provided by the Human Resources Services (5 questions);
- Personal evaluation of the interviewee's own situation (13 questions);

The interview schedule contained thirty-three questions, in the large majority open-ended (six closed questions) followed at the end by two possibilities for suggestions: (1) on how to monitor the team (related to a past unsuccessful experience) and (2) about personal wishes.

5. RESULTS

In this section, similar opinions expressed by different interviewees were pooled by the investigator. No quantitative weighting was applied. If an opinion expressed by an interviewee is cited verbatim, the quote is shown in "quotation marks".

Comments made by the investigator are shown in *italics*, in order to clearly differentiate them from the opinions expressed by the interviewees.

5.1 OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE AGENCY

In this section, questions tried to obtain an idea about the use and perception of the overall organizational set-up of the Agency for daily work.

5.1.1 The Overall Strategy of the Agency

The strategy of the Agency as a whole seems to be hard to understand for most Team Members. The perception goes from "the Agency has no strategy" to the understanding that "politics and funding are the driving forces" leading to the perception that many different strategies are at work. Many team members complained about the lack of strategy and the lack of vision. A minority (2) expressed the opinion that there is a written strategy, but that it is difficult to implement, not understandable or else not communicated appropriately. There is also the view that it is very difficult to cope with competing agendas, to establish priorities and to be strategic rather than reactive.

5.1.2 The Overall Organization of the Agency

The Agency's organizational chart is unknown to most, or else it is of little interest ("do not pay attention", "not understandable", "no logic"). In addition, it "changes all the time anyhow", and the frequent changes in unit / department names create problems and make it complicated and difficult for partners (*individuals or institutions*) from the outside to understand. The possibility that the organizational chart may make sense at high level is acknowledged, but the view is also expressed that it follows funding and persons rather than civil society priorities.

The general view is that the Agency, although quite well organized, is excessively bureaucratic and conservative ("most disappointing of the Agency"), being too formal, with too many lines of command, and guided by too many outside concessions ("although these are necessary but uncomfortable"). However, one individual recognized that "this has a good side in that it helps to preserve the Agency's good reputation and credibility".

The organizational features of Headquarters versus almost autonomous Local Offices puts additional constraints, and several staff members think that it is not easy to manage because there is no will to change this ("clients like to play with this", "some Local Offices cannot cope, but refuse help - just want the money").

While the organizational structure of the Agency does not impede horizontal collaboration with other departments, it does not facilitate such collaboration either.

5.1.3 The Management

The management is too preoccupied with policy and upper management problems and thus too busy to take care of lower level managerial problems leading to insufficient guidance as a consequence. When managerial decisions and actions are taken, it seems that some actions are implemented even though "there is already published evidence of malfunction".

Management is based on politics and is mainly funds driven ("outsiders decide for the Agency ", "tasks or staff are never refused if money is attached", "weak, not visible, no political management - everything is driven by funding"). The constraint on management which comes from the fact that the team is "constantly out of money", due to a "budget more of than ten times less than what it should be", makes judgment of processes and products difficult. One member felt that there was a "disconnection between what the Council[1] of the Agency commands and what is done in reality".

The culture of staff management is characterized by a total lack of respect for employees, characterized by the perceived lack of recognition of one's own work and of the work of the team as such, the fact that the upper management of human resources gives no attention to the staff as person or to its professional or personal concerns, that problems are just ignored, that personal requests are treated poorly, that change is implemented without any consultation, and that nobody cares about job security ("the Agency is not kind, indeed very rough, with its employees, there is no back-up, no interest outside of the job, no job security, and constant change").

The managerial support is said to be of little help, with the exception of the assistance given to the establishment of staff contracts (fixed or short term). While the Agency has invested a lot in the managerial support - the outcomes are questionable, although some (27%) expressed the view that the managerial support was difficult to judge.

The management of staff is another source of disappointment. Managers are never trained nor hired for their qualifications as managers ("wrong people in the job"); poor behavior of an individual manager and personality dysfunctions are not managed.

From the perspective of emergency interventions, the managerial attitude is more of a fire-fighting response mechanism; the absence of a long-term vision is noteworthy. In addition, the response to an event may be dictated by matters of visibility towards clients, partners or media, although the outcome is known to be wrong up-front, leading to unbalanced interventions with respect to different emergency situations ("heavy involvement for the management of the one emergency vs. neglect of other important emergencies").

5.1.4 The Culture of Change in the Agency

The Agency has been advocating a culture of change for several years, both for interventions, staff management and geographical deployment.

The general view is that "the Agency speaks a lot and wastes a lot of time on this". For many this policy is not clear because important information does not filter down, briefing is insufficient. The approach to change is felt to be chaotic, un-strategic. Although greater change would be good, there is no understanding of how it fits with people. The idea of "decentralizing the overall structure of the Agency is good", but again difficult to implement due to the large independence granted to the Local Offices.

Outside consultants may be helpful, but their reports should be overtly available (e.g. "McKinsey report"). The abundance of experienced changes is felt to be disruptive, questionable, chaotic, unprepared, and lead to unnecessary tensions among the staff, without any significant organizational change. Structure and policy change is difficult to implement because it is often influenced by finance and clients' interests.

5.1.5 The Working Culture in the Agency

On the positive side: it was felt by several (36%) that there was a very collegial and cooperative spirit in the team and in the Agency (although this was less marked), creating a good atmosphere. People set aside their origin and private interests in the interest of the goals of the Agency.

On the negative side, weak team spirit, weak corporate identity ("no fostering of a organizational culture") and an orientation towards the protection of positions and salaries were mentioned by several interviewees ("don't say no to the boss"). There should be a "culture of excellence", but there is not enough investment in this regard. In addition the presence of too many short term staff members leads to a culture of mediocrity due to employment and income insecurity.

[1] The Council is the supreme decision-making body of the Agency

5.2 USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

In this section, questions tried to obtain a view about the issues related to the management of human resources.

5.2.1 Number of staff working in the Team

There is a unanimous feeling that the team is grossly understaffed and grossly under-resourced to meet what is expected from the Agency to fulfill its mandate. In addition, the overall perspective is difficult to see for some individuals, because "people work as individuals and not as a team". The understaffing concerns both field actions as well as the work in the offices of the Headquarters.

5.2.2 Recruitment of staff

The overall evaluation may be grouped in three categories.

1. Two (18%) stated that the process is acceptable and transparent for the recruitment of highly qualified specialists, but the responsibility should be taken out of the department (the appointment of an external recruitment agency was envisioned) to be able to "measure, evaluate people and judge their faults better".
2. Three (27%) reported that the process is very political. The geographical representation and professional profiles are sidetracked and at the same time a hindrance to recruitment ("inconsistency"), leading to some staff ending in the wrong position, even if there was a good match of skills at the start.
3. Many (55%) reported that that the theory is good, but in practice most qualified persons are already chosen upfront. The process is qualified as "rubbish, difficult, crooked". Numerous seconded staff[2] create dysfunctions related to the strategic interests of clients ("secondments are assigned to the Agency for the clients to have access to the Agency, consequently the Agency has no choice", "there are more seconded staff members than regular ones").

An open question is how does the Agency decide on the level of qualification of the staff engaged?

Generally all interviewees reported that there should be more technical staff and that there is an imbalance between short term and permanent positions. In addition, it is widely believed that the practice of opening competitions for short-term staff members in order to make them permanent staff is both absurd and ineffective as a whole (risk of loss, "other industries would never do that"). *This pertains to the fact that opening competition gives the possibility to have an imposed selection, thus the team/unit would loose the competent and well trained short-term staff member.* It is also felt that due to major organizational constraints, it is difficult to get the best people due to cultural quotas and unattractive contracts offered.

5.2.3 Assignment of hired staff

The way hired staff members are assigned leads to no good match of skills and tasks ("person's competence often not in line with its activity"), because ideas and reality are different. The intentions to follow the Terms of References in the work contract are good, but the drift is inevitable because of an "under-resourced, fire fighting" environment and the dependence on secondments (see also 5.2.2). On the other hand, this high flexibility is good in an environment that deals constantly with emergencies, but should be counter-balanced by more respect towards the staff.

5.2.4 Competence of staff members

Generally the level of competence of staff members is described as very high although this applies "not

[2] Some staff members are hired by the Agency, based on an agreement with a client who will send an employee and will pay for her/his salary.

to everyone, including myself[3]", and this is true in spite of the great variability of backgrounds required (e.g. emergency, business, communications, finance). There is often no competence in funding management within the Agency.

Again the fact that skills are not used properly, often not used in the right function and causing mismatch was reported by the majority (64%) of the interviewees.

Too many people lack real field experience. It is stated that secondments "lead to a lottery" (*this interviewee reported that competence seems regularly not to be of the highest priority in the selection process*).

An additional organizational handicap is that there is an on-going discussion in the Agency about the balance between staff member's competencies being a "generalist versus a specialist" creating a pull into two directions:

Comments included:

- "Specialists help and give credibility";
- "Top specialists should not be lost. Either they are hired internally or else located outside within other agencies/companies, but with a more robust management system" *(the team works with a network of institutions engaged in emergency interventions that is quite new; consolidation is on-going)*;
- "Keep balance, particular focus on quality of individuals";
- "There is a constructive mix in the team";
- "The time of top experts in the Agency is over, better to have generalists who bring together the best experts working in dedicated institutions";
- "There are currently not enough specialists to answer specific technical questions";
- "In other organizations there are fewer generalists in the field; makes job easier";
- "A good balance between generalists with a broad approach and technical experts is badly needed, but experts tend to disappear. This represents a disadvantage as compared to competitors";
- "Experts are disappearing - the Agency is loosing its credibility towards the outside";
- "Too many people in the Team just for networking";
- "Both specialists and generalists are needed - but in the Team a specialist does often do a generalist's job".

5.2.5 Turn-over and brain drain

The general view is that the turn-over is low, particularly when considering that 2/3 of the staff members are short term, "working 120% with little reward" and with serious uncertainties to keep their job. Therefore better retention is observed compared to other departments, albeit little investment in people is carried out. People are dedicated. "A little more turn-over would be good, but the presence of numerous short term staff ensures constant turn-over".

On the other hand, a minority expressed serious concern that the turn-over is far too high with potential harmful consequences:

- "Too much, 8 changes in 5 years";
- "Destructive, information gets lost, archives get lost, disorganizes work unnecessarily";
- "Constant haemorrhage of experience = institutional memory is now at zero";
- "The Team has accumulated invaluable experience, danger for the future - a haemorrhage would be a disaster for the Agency";

[3] This reflects the interviewee's perception of the mismatch of his/her own position. It may indicate a stressful condition, but this was not investigated in this context.

- "Good people get burned out and will leave";
- "Key people are leaving the Agency, but this happens much less in our Team"[4];
- "What about short-term staff?"

The general view is that in the Team (as opposed to other teams within the Agency) there appears to be not too much brain drain "as of today" (concerns about the future have been expressed). However, opportunities have been lost by not retaining people (some due to chronic lack of funding), or by people who were given promises, but then not hired. Another explanation given is that the current relatively low rate of brain drain may be due to the fact that "the staff is not attractive for the other industries".

5.2.6 "Middle - management"

All interviewees were happy with their direct first level supervisor, but several dysfunctional elements were diagnosed:

- "The presence of 2 directors in the Department is not clear from a managerial view";
- "The directors are too much upward oriented, "nobody looks down" with the result that information does not flow ("little knowledge of what others do, sometimes even in the same office");
- "It was felt appropriate to have a "program manager group", but directors should not only do fund-raising and management of financial allotments, but should be also leaders in their field";
- "Middle management is non existent";
- "The constraints are too great for managers because they are at the same time coordinators and technical project leaders. Thus, middle management is more technical than managerial and in the end the coordinators become more administrators than coordinators";
- "People become managers without attributes, or even interest";
- "Middle management is frustrated - managers are put into untenable situations with no power to decide and little information with which to make decisions. Everything is pushed up, therefore no decisions are taken because of the lack of understanding of conflicts between personal interests and of the clients' agendas";
- "Middle managers are victims from the top; they cannot cope because of too many tasks, and no tools or resources are made available for managing. The assistance to the Team from one of the director's offices is not clear";
- "There is no redline when no funding is available";
- "There is no strong model for managing skills and tasks";
- "There is no long-term vision, everything is concentrated around twisting funding and this hurts the Agency".

In summary, although the lower level management is clearly focused on delivery of products, and this is the main asset of the Agency, the Agency is deeply hurt by the above-mentioned inconsistencies and by the plethora of uncertainties. The interviewees felt also that it is difficult to judge performance at the higher level because of the difficulties resulting from the severe lack of resources.

5.3 HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES

In this section, questions tried to obtain a view about issues related to the organizational tools offered and used for the management of human resources.

[4] this reflects the interviewees' opinion that this is an organizationwide problem, not just limited to the Team

5.3.1 Work contracts

For several interviewees (45%), this item was not relevant because they were seconded by their employer.

Everyone felt that the personal employment contract that they had signed with the Agency was acceptable, but complaints came from the great insecurity and instability due to financial constraint and as a consequence, the establishment of short term contracts ("short term 3-5 months contracts are appalling - against human rights?", "short-term, long-term, all this is bullshit").

Again the assignment was questioned ("correct contract, wrong job"), as well as how the Agency decides about the ranking of engagements (level at which a professional is hired), with several interviewees expressing the opinion that there seems to be no correlation with experience and responsibilities.

5.3.2 Social security

The advantage of being seconded by clients is the security provided by the client/employer taking back its staff member when s/he leaves the Agency. For the rest (short term, fixed term) there is no safety net. One interviewee reported that the staff is well protected in the Agency. Generally, there were no complaints about this item, although for most the social security issues were not well known, or else not applicable.

5.3.3 Service by the Managerial Support Team (MST)

The human resources policy followed by the MST of the Department is not well known ("what is the policy?"), sometimes even limited to "hiring and signing". The service of "Contract Management" is acknowledged to function well in most cases. The establishment of their own personal employment contract was rarely hampered with problems, albeit the process was deemed to be very slow in many cases (55%). Some expressed their disappointment ("service is poor - things get lost, slow process", "the outcome is poor - is it the process (mission impossible) or are they poor performers?"). Social support in one case was "pathetic", when the staff member moved to Headquarters ("just lump sum"). However, all interviewees acknowledged the outstanding, helpful and dedicated administrative and secretarial assistance provided by the administrative support staff of the Team.

Generally, it was felt that the MST was linked (at least administratively) to the "HR policy disaster of the Agency", and that it was "more of an obstacle than an assistance".

About the compliance with legal requirements of the MST, most did not have any opinion. One interviewee expressed the fact that there seem to be no special deals, and that matters are handled "in the spirit of the law rather than the letter". Another interviewee was not quite sure about the compliance with legal requirements ("is it the rule, or is it personal interpretation?").

5.3.4 Assessment of annual performance

The assessment of annual performance, as made with the performance management and development system (PMDS) was seen to be ineffective, not helpful and a waste of time ("joke, farce"). Also the system is hard to use and interpret ("elsewhere (*outside of the Agency*) also no good", "how do you measure performance?", "10% of everything or focus on highest priority?").

There is no audit, no accountability, no assessment, no punishment, no reward - therefore the whole process is seen just as a paper fill work: "Anglo-Saxon way of assessing - looking a lot at your own work, while doing this you don't perform the tasked work". The PMDS is seen as useless ("one box for general decision") and as rubbish in the absence of a career development plan and of the recognition of personal achievements.

The effort of standardization is recognized, but "the metrics for measuring deliverables are difficult to implement in the Agency". Are professional positions the same across the Agency? PMDS is a good tool per se, but the PMDS is misused across the Agency - ("the correct assessment of staff in the Team would impede their future, because others cheat (*in other Teams or Departments*) ! It's bullshit").

5.3.5 Staff training

Generally the training possibilities offered by the Agency (central Human Resources, MST or Team) are not well known ("it is not laid out"), or not known at all, with the exception of the language courses ("excellent"). What is the full scope of the training offered? The access is mostly based on private initiatives ("you feed and figure out yourself", "the information depends on specific people - mostly you have to look for it yourself", "courses are there - not readily available"). One individual had a bad experience with a course that was cancelled by a private provider - the Agency did not react and did not want to address the problem - leaving the participant to pay out of his/her own pocket.

There is no strategy for training; often supervisors think training is useless. The staff is, if not trained outside of the Agency, totally unprepared for field work. Staff orientation should be more standardized, "better re-orientation for older staff should be offered, to stay tuned and not to stay locked in your world".

What happens to staff development loans, why does the department have to pay for training when resources are available at the level of the MST? Certain things are offered, others not, there is no real opportunity to apply (access? decision process?), and there is no flexibility. The MST/central Human Resources spends no time investing in people's development ("no nurturing of competence", "our former CEO has built up on short term staff"). As a consequence, there is no institutional memory building up ("memory resides in administrative support staff only!").

The absence of qualified media training that is so critical for the Team was mentioned by several interviewees ("the Agency will run into trouble"). The absence of upfront managerial training for newly designated managers was incomprehensible for many. The course on information technology was quoted as very bad by two members.

One individual stated: "if the Agency is a center of excellence: why is it necessary to do training? There's a contradiction".

5.3.6 Career development

The great majority stated that there was absolutely no career planning ("it looks good from the outside - but there is no place to go in the Agency"). The Agency was felt unable to secure its staff overall. In the absence of a career plan, and sometimes related to the deep respect of hierarchy in the Agency, "competence leads to disempowerment, in contrast with incompetence which leads to empowerment". Two interviewees suggested managing this from outside of the department by an independent group.

Although many (45%) said that they made significant personal progresses ("career plan nil -yet it worked for me", "it will be beneficial for my future"), none was in relation with organizational planning ("it's up to me - is it better in other departments of the Agency?"). Several interviewees stated that the Agency has no interest in improving skills ("to make life easier and to be more effective") - therefore no rewards are to be expected if improvements are made. The absence of training of junior staff ("send a junior with an experienced staff on mission") again reflects that there is no will to improve.

5.4 Personal Evaluation of One's Own Situation

This section is devoted to the analysis of the personal situation of the interviewee, not necessarily in line with the above mentioned organizational matters.

5.4.1 Assignment

The comments about one's personal assignments did not differ significantly from the answers made in the above section linked to the overall organization, and will therefore not be repeated. Seven of the interviewees thought their assignment was in line with their terms of reference of employment set up at the time of their appointment, however some terms of reference of employment were vague and sub-generic, leaving the door open to a wide area of functions. For the others this was not the case, but "they put up with".

5.4.2 Mobility of staff

The responses could be grouped in two themes: (1) personal travel, or (2) reassignment by the Agency to another location.

1. The evaluation varied substantially among the interviewees, varying from "pretty happy" to "not enough consideration for the family" and not enough social support. In general there was a high degree of satisfaction, and it was considered an asset for the department to stay up to date. A few (18%) noted too much travel.
2. The move to locations outside of the Headquarters was generally found to be good, provided the move is not forced. There is a high interest but it is difficult to implement ("it does not work") due to low flexibility, the absence of willingness and lack of cooperation to make it work at the peripheral level, and lack of adequate preparedness in some instances.

5.4.3 Composition of the team

Again the fact that the Team is grossly under-resourced was highlighted by many (*signaling the implications at the individual level*); some acknowledged that great efforts had been made to improve this by the direct supervisors, however with limited success.

The good team spirit reigning in the Team was highlighted by most, based on a cooperative team spirit, an interesting mix of people and cultural diversity. Again the problem posed by the many individuals seconded by over agencies into core competencies was deemed to be not ideal for the interviewees at the individual level.

The mix of skills was acknowledged to be fairly good, but there are some gaps ("not enough competencies", "many different types of skills needed - needs improvement", "good individuals but mismatched"). Generally there is a good male/female balance, but an imbalance in the cultural representations. The team could be better organized in relation to field operations by having a more clear division between logistics/support/field generalists.

A few complained that they did not know who was in the team and that team leaders were too often absent.

5.4.4 Participation in working groups

All interviewees participated in one way or another in working groups and quoted this as a stimulating and valuable experience. However there was a general consensus that, although meetings favor transversal work, and although this is one major asset for establishing consensus ("sometimes good, sometimes necessary and painful"), too many meetings are held ("meetings about meetings", "takes time away"). Meetings should be better organized, with more advanced planning and with a more strategic framework.

5.4.5 Professionalism among team members

The professional qualifications of the vast majority of individuals in the Team are overwhelmingly estimated as very high, with a high commitment for product delivery ("but poorly managed and tasked"). The Team Leader is a good director, a passionate person "full of ideas". However, poor behavior of individuals and personality dysfunctions *(outside of the Team*) are not managed at all and this harms the Team ("creates victimization"). Some (27%) felt that "vultures" in other parts of the Agency wanted to take over what is working well in the Team.

5.4.6 Motivation

The motivation among all interviewees was high to very high in spite of major roadblocks ("you get infected by the tasks", "very important and valuable work for civil society, but no support from the Agency", "no budget assigned"). For some this was more so in doing field work than when working in Headquarters. Major concerns about their own motivation in the future were expressed ("what about further motivation in the future", "many ups and downs", "it's still present", "it's decreasing", "job is too stressful, too time-consuming").

5.4.7 Burn out

All interviewees reported that the burn out problem was not adequately addressed. ("Burn out is a real problem that is not discussed", "there's far too much to do with insufficient resources"). Regular 12 hour days were the rule during emergency interventions ("the individual is exploited to the level it lets it be", "middle management does its best to help, but there are no resources to address the problem, the Agency does not care"). Handling the situations is left to the individual ("I recovered, but with no assistance", "seeking help is useless", "I will take active steps by myself"). Due to these circumstances, there is no need for tools on "how managers should detect depression in their staff" *(this refers to a former initiative aimed at monitoring the staff members' psychological state).*

5.4.8 Personal development

This question dealt with the own personal development achieved by the interviewee. Some overlap was found with the comments expressed in the questions that dealt with the training of staff (4.3.5) and career development (4.3.6). The answers have been nevertheless been consolidated in this section, in order to highlight some individual observations.

Because the Team is at the frontline (e.g. media, meetings, emergency interventions), almost every interviewee signaled that s/he had developed her/his personal capacities during his work ("learning experiences in the field stimulating", "tremendous learning experience"). However, this was never done deliberately ("get it yourself", "no obvious design for that", "nothing is offered by the Agency", "defense of women related matters is considered a waste of time"[5]). In addition, there is no time for it. Consuming work and duties make it impossible for professionals to publish their results and outcomes ("no publication = credibility problem"), although the work has a great impact on people. Frustration comes from the fact that no ground work is done - just constant fire fighting. A few (18%) interviewees signaled that personal development is not appreciated, not valued by higher organizational levels.

5.4.9 Appreciation by others

The Team colleagues are uniformly supportive ("very much from colleagues"), but rarely is credit given for work achieved outside of the Team ("at best you get flattery"). Compared to the risks encountered, there is little appreciation and there are doubts about the quality of the feedback (sincerity, jealousy?). Two interviewees mentioned however that recognition was by no means worse in the Agency than elsewhere (*in other agencies/companies*).

5.4.10 Remuneration

Remuneration was considered by many to be fair ("considering that you give up your family network") to very good. Remuneration was not seen as a major problem, but the absence of guarantee of stability was again mentioned. Several interviewees expressed frustration, that the job in the field is not rewarded/compensated, although it represents a great effort for oneself and for one's family. A minority said that the remuneration was no more than correct ("not competitive with other agencies/companies", "no real increase over the years"). One interviewee felt that the remuneration was too high, leading to "some just staying in their jobs".

5.4.11 Risk management

On a regular basis, staff members are exposed to certain risks while in the field (direct risks linked to the intervention itself, or others such as traffic accidents).

The Agency is not concerned with risk management for the Team ("vaccinations good, nothing for field work"), although the Team's activities are highly visible to the outside and critical for the Agency. As the Team is getting bigger and bigger to adjust to its mandate, trouble will be inevitable in the future ("more people = more robust safety", "lucky that no accident occurred so far", "hopefully no adding to victim tally"). The Agency should build a system to manage risk, nothing is in place ("think also of

[5] matters related to the defense of status and career of women

partners!", "the Team Leader worries, needs a manager"). The staff is not protected, there is no framework, no assessment of the fundamental requirements, no audit for decision-making, no scan of the environment ("there is more to do, but we are tired of fighting uphill battles against bureaucrats that do not take operational aspects much into consideration", "because the Agency is at the frontline, this is a great risk"). At least risk management would deserve an annual discussion, "other organizations do more for their staff".

5.4.12 Coaching of the Team Staff

About half of the interviewees felt that coaching was good, as performed by coordinators or project leaders, but that it should be more prominent ("you have to seek it yourself - mentoring should be presented"), because there are "lots of folks with very long experience". One mentioned also that this could be a problem for individuals coming from cultures where asking for something is not permitted.

The other half felt that more should be done ("project leaders should coach more and facilitate access to world leaders"), in part because newly hired staff members are cut out because there is no time for a decent introduction. Again the absence of a clear motivation to improve staff performance was indicated as a great barrier to coaching ("no need for formal or informal mentoring because there is no career development"), partially explaining the absence of a structured approach ("no organizational frame to improve our role").

5.5 Open ended Suggestions and Thoughts

Some of the answers have been quoted as such, others were reformulated by the investigator in order to insure a balanced presentation and avoid redundancy.

5.5.1 Monitoring of the Staff

- "The individuals' performance appraisals should be more constructive and detailed"
- The measure of absenteeism as an indicator of staff well-being was considered;
- "Monitoring of the staff, even though desirable is impossible, because most of the work comes in response to crisis (stressful, time critical, visible). Consequently the staff cannot be protected";
- "Supervisors should dedicate more time to evaluation. Currently they are too busy to guarantee more discussions on how staff members feel and think";
- Coordinators should feel more responsible for the well-being of team members ("but nowhere is this written", "good or bad does not lead to any evaluation", "nobody cares");
- A professional psychological team should be created for the debriefing of staff returning from difficult missions;
- "Regular checks to see if there is a problem should be performed to reduce insecurity";
- "If problems are to occur in the future - and they will", three interviewees stated that "the upper management has been warned several times";
- The high grade of professionalism of most team members leads to negligence by the managers ("we are the victims of our professionalism");
- "See the library for a place of excellence (staff committed, excellent hires, skills developed, decision making for can/cannot - but the mission of the library is probably easier than the one of the Team");
- One interviewee suggested the introduction of an "admiral's call". *The admiral's call used by the US Navy ensures that a quite senior person, not involved in the command chain* ("could hurt your career - we're living on planet earth!")*, spends yearly a day to know what the troops think, by letting concerns being expressed*

(e.g.: car park, salary). "Just expressing the concerns, even if they cannot be changed, may bring relief";

- "There's nothing to monitor, just address the already well known short comings!";
- "Having regular retreats would be constructive and team building".

5.5.2 Wishes

- "There should be more field professionals hired, the current situation will not last - the team will die";
- The sharing of tasks should be improved, keeping in mind that managers are too busy to even find time to delegate;
- "The Agency should become less segregated";
- A human but goal oriented management should be put in place ("resources are to be exploited, people are to be respected, and not the other way round");
- Prioritization of what is done is mandatory;
- Let's have less fire fighting and more information about what is going on in the Team ("better information about field work", "does not know what is exactly going on");
- Do not hire short term staff unless it is really for the short term, keeping in mind however that it is better to work short term than not working at all. Efforts should be made to limit the short term contracts to a maximum of four years ("but what about reality?");
- "Big need for change, but I have no solution";
- A better mission statement is warranted, ("we're just putting out fires", "why do we exist", "codify 3 items as constitutional goals and missions, which will give criteria for decisions and focusing of the team's and individual's efforts");
- Just address the existing short comings.

6. ANALYSIS

This report reproduces statements and analytical comments without complacency. Critical comments are numerous, and represent the general feelings and concerns present in the team at the time of the study. It has to be recognized that the interviews represented one of the rare occasions given to the staff in which they could express themselves in-depth without fear of consequences. Therefore it is likely that the interviewees have spoken more about their frustrations and problems than about matters that are going on well. It should also be remembered that the format of the interview schedule favors the expression of negative feelings.

The analysis will follow the general structure of the interview schedule.

6.1 THE OVERALL ORGANIZATION OF THE AGENCY

Under its fundamental governing structure the leadership of the Agency is controlled by the Council. In addition, Headquarters and Local Offices are quite independent from each other. This puts the Team and the Agency sometimes under the pressure of having many divergent agendas, and this pressure is clearly identifiable at the level of the Team. It is recognized that this cannot be changed. Part of it is blamed on the Agency's incapacity to accurately monitor its activities and to be accountable in a transparent way to its clients, and part of it on the Agency's bureaucracy. However there is the suspicion among a few staff members that some clients have the will to keep the Agency in an ineffective state for personal reasons. If this turns out to be true, then the result is a dysfunctional and sick organization, with lower level managers selected by client driven decisions rather than based on competence. When management operates this way, there is nothing effective, good or healthy in the organization's work outcomes, and it has been established that the staff members suffer most in such a context [15]. But in the end it is the credibility and reputation of the organization as a whole that will be in danger [16].

The lack of a clear strategy (as perceived by the staff) combined with the lack of a clearly practical operating structure working across the whole Agency leaves the Team staff members often unguided. The analysis of outcomes functions more in a reactive way ("barometer instrument") than as a structured process, and there is a mix of priorities and emergencies; priorities are explained, but daily work is governed by emergencies.

It is remarkable that such profound strategic considerations about the constraints are considered by the staff at this low hierarchical level. It shows that the staff is knowledgeable about the context in which the Agency operates and interested in assisting in finding solutions. The Team feels also responsible towards the financial contributors, whose money should be spent carefully. As a consequence this implies in return that the management cannot deliver flimsy or superficial explanations in case of dysfunctions, and that some of the problems encountered must be addressed at the highest level [11, 12].

The size of the Agency, its culture and the multiplicity of services that the Agency is requested to deliver, makes change difficult to implement. A strong, committed and courageous leadership at the high and middle managerial level is needed to achieve the required changes. It is however also recognized that changing the overall strategy and organization of the Agency is not a realistic goal for the Team; this task has to be handled by the top management.

6.2 USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The rapid growth of the Team in a relatively short period of time has put constraints on the Team, which has left the expansion of the operational and managerial functions behind. The chronic lack of human resources at all levels and in all areas of expertise, mainly due to the unresolved funding capability, is another factor of serious concern. There is the high necessity to expand the number of staff, not to

expand the mandate, but just to ensure that the currently pledged services are deliverable.

As reported by many (64%), the risk of a collapse of the Team is foreseen in the not so distant future. This would be a real disaster for the Agency, as the Team delivers many of the most urgent, most visible and most needed actions. In addition, the cost vs. outcome ratio of the Team is outstanding within the Agency, but also compared to other organizations. It is difficult to envision increasing the very high degree of dedication of its staff; on the contrary simply maintaining the actual level may prove to be difficult.

The initial intent to create a tool for the monitoring of the team sprit and for the generation of feedback for supervisors was abandoned after the unsuccessful initial attempt to create such an instrument. Rather, the general view is that the currently identified problems should be considered and addressed.

6.3 Human Resources Services

The central Human Resources Services lack, according to the majority (82%) of staff members, a clear vision and guidance on how the Agency should be managed, and therefore on how the Team should be managed. This is highlighted by the lack of adequate training offered, and the lack of clear guiding principles in managing human resources. The clustering of the management, evaluation, promoting and training practices makes it difficult to implement an organization-wide strategic managerial policy, although this would be most necessary. This explains the impossibility of assessing the annual performance of staff members in a comparable way throughout the Agency, and the impossibility of ensuring that the same qualification leads to the same classification across the whole Agency. The lack of definition of core capacities, lack of definition of rules for hiring, lack of follow-up, lack of rewards for good management, absence of consequences for bad management, all leave the professional staff in a world of great uncertainty [22]. The absence of clear career development policy adds up to the uncertainty.

The overall appreciation of the departmental services (MST) responsible for the Team is that it is overly bureaucratic and offers little support. Many processes could be streamlined, but even though declarations of intent are made regularly, it appears that processes get more complicated. Therefore, the services provided are not particularly well rated (with the exception of the establishment of work contracts), and this is rather annoying because the department has to pay a substantial amount of money for these services. This creates some bad feelings in the Team.

6.4 Personal Evaluation of One's Own Situation

Most of the concerns expressed by the staff are associated with the uncertainty which has been reported and with the disrespect expressed by supervisors and the Agency to one's own person. The perceived (and often evidenced) precarious employment conditions, have been almost unanimously cited as a factor of intensification of stress, dissatisfaction and insecurity.

There is also a concern about the fact that identified problems are rarely addressed, leading to a slow deterioration of working conditions, a decreased sense of security and a sense of being unimportant for the Agency.

The above, combined with some managerial deficits in the department, raised the perception that there is no culture of respect in the Agency, and this is not found acceptable. The opinion prevails that the Agency has to be the leader and not the follower of outdated managerial practices [19], some of which have been implemented although they were already known to malfunction elsewhere according to the opinion of two staff members.

6.5 Open Ended Suggestions and Thoughts

Among the many suggestions, three are highlighted here:

- The creation of a professional psychological team to de-brief the staff and to conduct regular

checks;

- The organization of team retreats;
- The establishment of an "admiral's call" (for definition see 4.5.1).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The findings made by interviewing a limited number of staff seem nevertheless significant because (1) there is a complete coherence in all interviews conducted, no significantly diverging opinions were found, and (2) these findings are coherent with many complaints that are covertly expressed organization-wide in meetings, gatherings, corridor and coffee talks. The general mood of the answers reported may be perceived as overly pessimistic, demotivated, and sometimes provocative. This report represents nevertheless a unique opportunity for the staff to express itself. Defining existing problems with the team members in order to address what is addressable and induce fruitful changes, is one of the major goals of this study.

Clearly the Team suffers from a dangerous management and leadership problem [17], in spite of the fact that the middle managers have been largely cleared of having any responsibility in this. One of the most significant (and addressable) problems lies with the absence of respect given not only to the individual staff members' achievements, but also to the Team as such. The high workload coupled with the perceived insecurity does not speak for a working environment that will insure good physical and mental health [14]. Currently the three most important issues that must be considered are:

- Lack of respect towards the person and the Team;
- Absence of security;
- Difficult working conditions, in part due to insufficient recruitment, this being related to insufficient funding.

It is known that such a situation leads to dysfunctions among the employees, but more important also to major costs and upheaval for the employer and the organization [2, 6, 15]. Ignoring this carries a high potential for the Team to malfunction and even to cease to exist in the future because of the collapse of the team structure. Implementing a culture of excellence for the selection and training of managers, as is the wish of all the interviewees, can only be done in a context where these fundamentals are realized. Excellence will lead to accountability and transparency. Such a policy can only be put into action with a high commitment of the top management [21].

Lack of resources, lack of a clear policy, and lack of time (being in part coupled with lack of resources) have been identified as the most significant causes of managerial practices that do not match with current standards found in other areas of industry and of some major public or private services [5]. Moreover, middle managers are not equipped with the managerial tools needed to provide the appropriate support, motivation, encouragement, validation and appreciation, all of which are essential and fundamental for a well-functioning team, and this may lead to the loss of the team's operational capacity [13]. Identifying resources to pay for the improvement of managerial activities seems to be one of the first priorities to consider, because there is a will and a great potential of the staff members to deploy efforts to find solutions to existing problems. This potential is currently underused, and it will vanish over time, in part because the management does not look down enough, and in part because the necessary resources to conduct such a time and energy consuming task are unavailable [2, 4].

The approach taken to find solutions will be important. Our view is that in light of the above, wide dissemination of the results would be counterproductive, because finding a solution to all identified problems is unrealistic. We rather suggest determining which of the described problems are the most urgent ones in the eyes of the middle and top management and then choosing the ones that have the greatest chance of being solved. The methods adopted to solve the targeted problems should address accurately the specific situation, and should not be based on easily available and usable marketed methods of training or managerial tools that do not fit with the Team's work [1]. The proactive assistance of the central Human Resources is essential for this undertaking [5, 8]. Mobilizing resources for managerial tasks may be one of the first steps to undertake.

The feeling is that the Team is currently at a crossroad that may be of critical importance for its future. Decisions made (or not made) may have a profound influence on its functionality and existence. The

numerous problems identified should be addressed, as emphasized by many interviewees. Taking no action will lead to outcomes, but they may be not the expected or desired outcomes. It is urgent to manage the current precariousness, as it is well established that managerial dysfunctions do not only impact the individual's health and performance, but also the outputs and the economic and financial results of the organization [6, 15].

We hope that this study will help to identify partners willing to invest in this field and to convince the Agency overall to address the critical needs that are yet unmet. This would be most useful because the problems identified in this study do not pertain to the Agency/the Team in particular, but are encountered on a nearly daily basis in managerial practices almost everywhere in the world, especially in the "western societies" [9].

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Apply a policy of respect with zero-tolerance for disrespect. Making it possible for staff members to be valued for their competencies and achievements, to be consulted when important decisions are taken and to be able to sense the teams' place within the Agency would significantly foster respect [8];
2. Reconsider the hierarchy. It appears that there are too many managerial levels leading to slow bureaucratic processes producing a false sense of adequate control;
3. Select and promote managers on the basis of a culture of excellence as the leading principle [10]. Selection should be based on established and recognized managerial competence and expertise, particularly related to interpersonal and communications skills. Selection by a body from outside of the Agency should be evaluated. This will in turn ensure accountability, boldness of action, credibility and improve the sense of security [7];
4. Implement a clear managerial organization-wide policy and an organization-wide performance, evaluation and feedback system (the current PMDS does not fulfill its expectations) that also addresses the specificities of the Team. Clearly the impossibility of assessing and validating staff performance is seen as a major difficulty. It is suggested that the staff should also be able to evaluate the performance of their managers twice a year. Those who do not satisfy should be moved out [17];
5. Endow middle managers with the managerial tools they need. Identify funding to invest in the development of appropriate, innovative and efficient managerial tools and training methods that apply to the specific context of the Team [3]. This will help to identify and prevent potentially difficult situations and improve the difficult working conditions [18];
6. The establishment of a professional psychological team for de-briefing and performing regular checks could be considered. However in a well-functioning managerial environment, most of the support tasks could and should be handled by the management in place. The assistance in developing "mutual support competencies" among staff members, and the creation of a specially trained "supervisor core group" could be considered [20]. Therefore the professional psychological support team should only deal with cases that go beyond the team's competency, and this activity could be outsourced;
7. Evaluate the potential of the introduction of an "admiral's call"; although an interesting proposal to give a "venting" opportunity it is unlikely to achieve substantial change. An anonymous complaint box could achieve the same limited effect.

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11. ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The Agency as an organization in general

What do you think of the Agency's strategy?

How do you rate the performance of the overall management ?

The Agency is implementing a policy of change, what is your opinion about it?

What do you think about the working culture ?

Do you know the Agency's organigram, and how do you use it ?

Specific problems related to services provided by the human resources

Assess the number of staff working in the Team

What do you think of the recruitment policy ?

What do you think of the assignment policy ?

Do you think there should be more or less generalists or more or less specialists in the Team ?

What is the level of staff competence in the Team ?

Is there a high, adequate or low turn-over of staff members in the Team ?

Do you think that brain-drain is a problem in the Team ?

Give your opinion about the performance of your Middle - Management

Comment the employment contract you have signed

Is the social security provided adequate ?

Human resources policy of the Agency

Comment about the quality of services you have been using

How do you think that the administration complies with legal requirements ?

How do you evaluate the assessment of annual performance (PMDS) ?

How do you perceive the information and training strategies provided ? Do you use them ?

How do you rate the career development plans offered ?

Personal evaluation of your own situation

What about you personal assignment ?

What do you think of the mobility policy that the Agency is trying to implement ?

What do you think of how the Agency envisions separation from a staff member ?

Give your opinion about the composition of the Team

Do you participate in working groups, is it good for you ?

Your opinion about the level of professionalism found in the Team

How do you see your own motivation to work ?

Is there "burn out" in the Team ? What about yourself ?

How do you see your personal development presently and in the future ?

Do you receive appreciation by others for your work ?

What do you think about your salary and about salaries in general ?

Is there a risk management policy and a risk assessment of your work ?

What do you think of coaching ? Have you experienced it ?

How and what to monitor ?

I'm listening to your requests or ideas